

News from **Fulbright Home Inspections**

Commercial and Residential (Lic. #70001143)

(918) 707-0689

Septic Tanks

I am looking at a home with a septic tank. What do I need to know?

#1. You can probably get a history and a diagram of the septic tank from DEQ records. Call (405) 702-6172.

- Different countries / different areas have different DEQ offices. Tell them where it is and they will tell you the office to contact.
- You will need the legal description.

#2. How often should a tank be pumped and how much does it cost?

- General rule of thumb is to have a septic tank pumped every three to five years.
- The cost of pumping a septic tank usually range from \$75 to \$200.

#3. How do I know if it needs pumping out?

- Have it checked by a licensed pumper.

The tank should be pumped if:

- The sum of the solid layers (sludge plus scum) takes up more than half of the tank capacity, or
- The top of the sludge layer is less than a foot below the outlet baffle or tee, or
- The bottom of the scum layer is within three inches of the bottom of the outlet baffle (on the top of the outlet tee).

#4. What are signs of trouble?

- Frequent or persistent foul odors in your home or yard.
- Slow or backed up drains.
- Wet, spongy ground or lush plant growth near a septic tank or drain field.
- Repeated intestinal illnesses.
- Excessive weed growth and algal blooms in nearby ponds or lakes.

Assessing Your Septic System Design and Location

Use the following assessment to begin rating your pollution risks. For each question, put the risk level number (1, 2, or 3) in the column labeled "Your Risk." Although some choices may not correspond exactly to your situation, choose the response that best fits.

	1. Low Risk / Safest Situation	2. Medium Risk / Potential Hazard	3. High Risk / Unsafe Situation	Your Risk
Capacity of system	Tank designed to handle more than enough wastewater, based on the size of the home and occupancy.	No excess capacity.	Undersized system. Bedrooms or water-using appliances added without expanding the wastewater system.	
Separation distances	Drainfield at least 100 feet from any well or sensitive area.	Drainfield between 50 and 100 feet from a well or surface water.	Drainfield less than 50 feet from a well or surface water.	
Age of system or holding tank (year installed)	Less than 5 years old.	Between 6 and 20 years old.	System more than 20 years old.	

Information from: Oklahoma Cooperative Extension, Ag Sciences and Natural Resources, OSU.
Household Wastewater, Assessment Worksheet #3.

#5. How should I protect my drain field?

- Do not drive vehicles on the drain field.
- Do not pave, build, pile logs, or set a swimming pool over the drain field, soil microbes need oxygen to digest wastes.
- Divert all water run off away from drain field. Saturated soil is less effective at treating waste water.
- Grass is the best cover. Avoid trees and shrubs.

#6. Where is the septic tank?

- Go back to #1, but, if no records are available, look 10 to 20 feet from the outside wall of the main bathroom and/or look for a cleanout. Probe the ground. The tank is usually within 1 foot of the surface.

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